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REGIONAL SMALL FARMS CONFERENCE

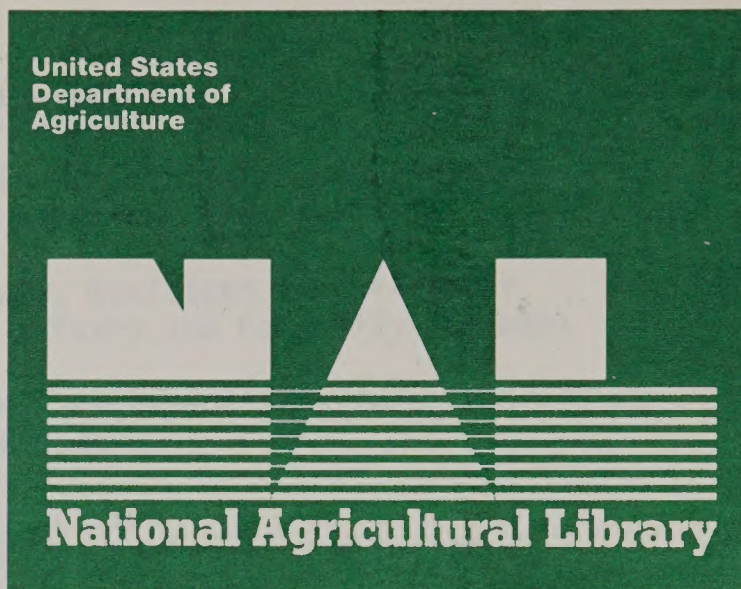
Results of Work Group Sessions August 22-23, 1978 La Grande, Oregon

**Co-sponsored by:
U.S. Department of Agriculture and
Community Services Administration**

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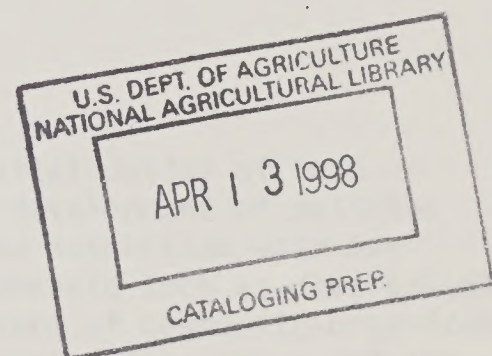
The U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Community Services Administration (CSA) are co-sponsoring this regional small farms conference in cooperation with ACTION. The conference is designed to:

- Provide small farm operators an opportunity to identify problems that are important to their farm operations and families.
- Develop priority needs and suggest programs that will benefit small farm operators and their families.
- Identify what small farm operators need, as contrasted with what other farmers need.

Follow-up from the conference will include a regional report and national summary of the five conferences. The information and recommendations from the conferences will be used to determine what administrative changes need to be made in USDA and CSA, and as the basis for new legislation and an administration policy for small farmers.

This computer report was prepared by:

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REGIONAL SMALL FARMS CONFERENCE

THE SMALL FARM ISSUE

BOB BERGLAND, Secretary of Agriculture

For too long, we have heard predictions that the small farmer will soon become extinct as those farm families are forced from the land. It has been a trend, but I am committed to improve USDA programs to better serve the small farm family and halt that trend.

We believe the small farm family in America is basic to a healthy farm and rural economy.

We believe the farm family is still the basis of a desirable pattern for American agricultural and rural living in this nation.

We will be listening to the farmer delegates attending these Small Farm Conferences and to their suggestions and recommendations. There will be follow-up action where we can identify changes that need to be made to help small farmers.

GRACIELA OLIVAREZ, Director of Community Services Administration

The Community Services Administration, as the national advocate for the low-income and economically disadvantaged, recognizes the critical need to assist low-income farmers and their families in improving their economic condition and quality of life through resource mobilization, delivery of services and improved access to Federal, state and local services and programs.

SAM BROWN, Director of ACTION

In a large sense our futures are inseparable.

At ACTION we are committed to the notion that the revitalization of both rural and urban communities depends primarily on the development of policies and practices that are smaller in scale than those now associated with our government. This commitment to smallness embraces concepts such as development of technologies more useful to family farms, development of community-organized programs that rely more on people's energy and imagination than money and the scaling down of government to make it more responsive to the best interests of its citizens.

If you can stay small and, with some help from us, find a way to prosper then I believe our approach to problems will also succeed.

RUPERT CUTLER, Assistant Secretary of Agriculture
for Conservation, Research and Education

We have programs of conservation, research and education for the small farm family. In spite of these programs, we are not reaching enough small farm families with conservation and research information through our educational channels.

Do small farm operators need conservation and research programs different from other farmers?

Do small farm families need a different educational approach--more one-to-one contact with a para-professional than group contact?

We expect the Small Farm Conference work groups of farmer delegates to provide guidelines to answer these and related questions with an indication of priority needs. Then, we can propose and move ahead with administrative and legislative changes.

DALE HATHAWAY, Assistant Secretary of Agriculture
for International Affairs and Commodity Programs

The Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service conducts the USDA farm program for cost sharing programs with all farmers that install needed soil, water, workland and wildlife conserving practices. We will be very interested to see what the Small Farm Conferences can identify in the cost sharing programs that should be changed to better serve the small farm operator.

The Federal Crop Insurance Program provides farmers in counties where available with all-risk insurance that repays production costs of crop loss because of bad weather, insects, disease and other unavoidable natural causes. This program is structured to serve all farmers, and we welcome suggestions on how to extend the Federal Crop Insurance Program to more small farmers.

ALEX MERCURE, Assistant Secretary of Agriculture for Rural Development

Listening to the men and women and minorities who operate the small farms in America make the five regional Small Farm Conferences an opportunity for the Secretary of Agriculture and his staff to have grass roots input from the people needing help in the rural community.

We believe that rural development in the states is synonymous with improving the quality of living and increasing income for the small farm family.

The Department of Agriculture has rural development programs such as the loan programs of the Farmers Home Administration which are designed to aid the small farm operator. We anticipate the conferences will identify any inadequacies in programs that will help us make them more accessible for the small farmer. We will make every effort to change and initiate needed programs.

JOAN WALLACE, Assistant Secretary of Agriculture for Administration

This administration is interested in co-sponsoring conferences on small farm problems not because there are many small farms, but because they represent many people--over 60 percent of all farmers!

What we need to keep in focus is that people on these small farms live and toil, raise families, have hope and ambition, contribute to society, and produce food and fiber for the nation.

We prefer to think about the small farm problem as a matter of families--not statistics. We believe that the people who are in need of help also have some knowledge of how help might be structured to give the most benefit for the least dollars invested. In other words, we believe suggestions and counsel from small farm families can be highly beneficial in the decision and legislative process where USDA represents your concerns and needs. We are dedicated to providing equal opportunities for agricultural services.

HOWARD HJORT, Director of Economics, Policy Analysis and Budget

Information gathered from these regional conferences will help USDA's Economics, Statistics, and Cooperatives Service improve Federal agricultural data systems to better serve the needs of small farmers. In addition, more knowledge about the characteristics and needs of the small farm operator and his family will help Department officials improve programs to increase family income from both farm and nonfarm sources.

Besides research, the Economics, Statistics and Cooperatives Service provides technical assistance to help farmers market their products and purchase supplies cooperatively. We hope that what we learn from these Conferences will enable us to make these programs more useful to small farmers.

We are committed to making every effort to see that our work serves the interests of small farm families.

JOHN LEWIS, Associate Director, Domestic Operations for ACTION

We are happy to be allied with the Department of Agriculture and the Community Services Administration for this important "listen and learn" conference. Both agencies have helped us to develop successful volunteer programs for rural America.

ACTION has volunteers in the field today assisting small farmers on production and marketing problems. Many more volunteers are working in rural areas to improve housing, education, recreation and health services and to provide help for the frail elderly.

There is still much to be done. We welcome your ideas and look forward to the development of dynamic solutions to problems of family farms.



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PROBLEM RATINGS: Delegates in their working groups rated the importance of the problems they identified on a scale of 1 to 5. A "5" meant the problem was of utmost importance. A "1" indicated lowest importance. A zero rating, or no rating at all, meant the delegate had no opinion. The problem ratings shown below are averages of the delegates' ratings.

WORKING GROUP I PRODUCTION, MANAGEMENT, AND MARKETING (Livestock)

PROBLEM RANK	PROBLEM DESCRIPTION	AVERAGE PROBLEM RATING
1	PRICES ARE TOO LOW.	4.93
2	THE U.S. HAS A CHEAP FOOD POLICY THAT HURTS THE SMALL FARMER.	4.86
3	IMPORTS SHOULD MEET U.S. STANDARDS (INSPECTION AND LABELLING BY SOURCE).	4.86
4	NEED TO DEVELOP EXPORT MARKETS.	4.71
5	NEED TO MARKET AGRICULTURAL GOODS AT PRODUCTION COST PLUS PROFIT MARK-UP.	4.71
6	NEED MARKETING ALTERNATIVES--DIRECT MARKETING, BULK COMMODITY EXCHANGES, MARKETING COOPERATIVES, VERTICAL INTEGRATION, ETC.	4.64
7	NEED TO DEVELOP A MARKETING SYSTEM IN FARMING THAT WOULD INSURE THE PRODUCER A REASONABLE PROFIT AFTER EXPENSES.	4.43
8	NEED TO EDUCATE THE AMERICAN PEOPLE TO THE TRUE VALUE OF FOOD.	4.43
9	WE NEED TO PROTECT U.S. FARM PRODUCE FROM IMPORTS.	4.36
10	NEED MORE RESEARCH ON MARKETING PRACTICES SUITABLE TO SMALL FARMS.	4.36



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11	NEED FOR TIGHTER CONTROLS TO PREVENT SPREAD OF LIVESTOCK DISEASES.	4.36
12	PACKERS HAVE MONOPOLY ON THE PRICE LIVESTOCK BRINGS.	4.21
13	TRANSPORTATION RATES ARE NOT SET ACCORDING TO ACTUAL COSTS.	4.15
14	RAILROAD LINES ARE BEING CLOSED DOWN.	4.00
15	NEED TO EASE REGULATIONS ON DIRECT SALES TO CONSUMERS.	3.93
16	NEED FOR ADEQUATE PREDATOR CONTROL, INCLUDING DOMESTIC DOGS (EXAMPLE 1080).	3.88
17	GOVERNMENT AGRICULTURAL OFFICIALS LACK PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE.	3.86
18	NEED TO DEVELOP BETTER TRANSPORTATION FACILITIES FOR FARM COMMODITIES, ESPECIALLY AT LOCAL LEVEL.	3.71
19	NEED TO COORDINATE PRODUCTION WITH MARKETING NEEDS	3.64
20	NEED TO INVESTIGATE A NATIONAL MARKETING BOARD SYSTEM FOR ALL AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS.	3.57



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WORKING GROUP II PRODUCTION, MANAGEMENT, AND MARKETING (crops)

PROBLEM RANK	PROBLEM DESCRIPTION	AVERAGE PROBLEM RATING
1	NEED TO BE ABLE TO MARKET AT PRODUCTION COST PLUS REASONABLE MARK-UP.	4.50
2	ARTIFICIAL SHORTAGES CREATE PRICE SPREADS THAT AFFECT COST OF PRODUCTION.	4.33
3	THE U.S. HAS A CHEAP FOOD POLICY THAT HURTS THE SMALL FARMER.	4.31
4	FOREIGN IMPORTS SHOULD MEET U.S. STANDARDS.	4.31
5	WE NEED MARKETING ALTERNATIVES--DIRECT MARKETING, BULK COMMODITY EXCHANGES, MARKETING COOPERATIVES, ETC.	4.23
6	THE GOVERNMENT WORKS AGAINST US NOT WITH US--CLOSING IMPORTS ON FOREIGN WIRE, OPENING IMPORTS ON FOREIGN BEEF--WE GET IT FROM BOTH DIRECTIONS.	4.23
7	NEED TO LEARN HOW TO USE THE FUTURES MARKET.	4.08
8	HEALTH REGULATIONS MAKE IT DIFFICULT FOR SMALL FARMERS TO COMPETE, ESPECIALLY WHEN IT COMES TO SELLING MILK AND MEAT.	4.00
9	NEED MORE RESEARCH ON PRODUCTION AND MARKETING PRACTICES SUITABLE TO SMALL FARMERS.	3.92
10	EDUCATE CONSUMERS TO FOOD VALUES AND UNDERSTANDING BENEFITS OF DIFFERENT FOOD PRODUCTION TECHNIQUES.	3.92



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11	FARMERS LACK POLITICAL POWER.	3.92
12	LACK OF EFFECTIVE PESTICIDES AND HERBICIDES FOR FARM USE.	3.92
13	FINDING NEW MARKETS.	3.92
14	FARMERS NEED LOCAL VOICE IN NATIONAL FARM POLICY.	3.92
15	AGRICULTURAL IMPORTS HAVE INFLUENCE ON OUR AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS.	3.85
16	LACK OF RESEARCH AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION ON ALTERNATIVE ENERGY SOURCES.	3.69
17	SMALL FARMERS HAVE TROUBLE COMPETING WITH LARGE CORPORATE FARMS.	3.69
18	RESEARCH AND ASSISTANCE ON INTEGRATED AND BIOLOGICAL PEST CONTROL.	3.69
19	ALASKA BEING A UNIQUE CASE NEEDS GOVERNMENT HELP TO DEVELOP AN AGRICULTURAL ECONOMIC BASE.	3.67
20	CONTROL OF IMPORTS AND EXPORTS SHOULD BE BY SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE, NOT THE STATE DEPARTMENT.	3.64



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WORKING GROUP III ACCESS TO CREDIT AND CAPITAL

PROBLEM RANK	PROBLEM DESCRIPTION	AVERAGE PROBLEM RATING
1	PRICES FOR FARM PRODUCTS ARE TOO LOW BECAUSE OF GOVERNMENTS CHEAP FOOD POLICY.	4.92
2	INFLATION RATE IS EXCESSIVE.	4.85
3	REVISE ESTATE TAX LAWS, DOING AWAY WITH CARRY-OVER BIASES AND THE PROVISIONS DISCRIMINATORY TO WIDOWS.	4.69
4	PROCESSING FMHA LOANS FROM RECEIPT OF APPLICATION TO APPROVAL IS TOO SLOW.	4.46
5	REVISE FMHA AND REAL ESTATE SECURITY POLICIES TO PROVIDE THAT THE ENTIRE FARM NEED NOT BE GIVEN AS SECURITY--ONLY THAT THE SECURITY BE FOR THE LOAN INVOLVED.	4.46
6	FMHA LOAN FUNDS ARE NOT ALWAYS AVAILABLE. LACK OF LOAN FUNDS.	4.38
7	TIE FMHA LOAN LIMITS BY FORMULA BASED ON AN INFLATION INDEX.	4.25
8	REVISE FMHA AND REAL ESTATE SECURITY POLICIES TO PROVIDE THAT THE ENTIRE FARM NEED NOT BE GIVEN AS SECURITY--ONLY THAT THE SECURITY BE FOR THE OPERATION LOAN INVOLVED.	4.25
9	SMALL & BEGINNING FARMERS NEED GUARANTEED LOANS.	4.15
10	NEED PREFERENTIAL INTEREST RATES FOR SMALL FARMS.	4.15



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11	GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS NEED TO MAKE MORE MONEY AVAILABLE, EVEN IF IT MEANS RAISING INTEREST RATES CLOSER TO COMMERCIAL RATES.	4.00
12	INCONSISTENT WITHIN FMHA BETWEEN AREAS IN THE APPLICATION OF POLICY.	4.00
13	\$100,000 FMHA OPERATING LOAN LIMIT IS TOO LOW.	4.00
14	HAVE A FEDERAL LOANING PROGRAM SIMILAR TO OREGON STATE VETERAN'S LOAN.	4.00
15	LACK OF CREDIT FOR FARMERS FOR SPECIALTY ENTERPRISES.	3.92
16	LACK OF ADEQUATE CREDIT AND CAPITAL TO KEEP ON PURCHASE OF FARM REAL ESTATE.	3.92
17	REVISE CAPITAL GAINS TAX AS APPLIED TO AGRICULTURAL PROPERTY AND FARMERS.	3.85
18	INTEREST RATES IN MOST CASES ARE TOO HIGH.	3.69
19	NOT MUCH LAND IS AVAILABLE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITHOUT MUCH COLLATERAL.	3.69
20	FMHA EMPLOYEES LACK INFORMATION ON, OR DO NOT UNDERSTAND NATIONAL POLICY.	3.67



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WORKING GROUP IV LAND AND WATER USE

PROBLEM RANK	PROBLEM DESCRIPTION	AVERAGE PROBLEM RATING
1	PROTECT AGRICULTURAL LAND FOR AGRICULTURAL PURPOSES ONLY. WAYS TO PROTECT: A) TAX INCENTIVES, B) PLANNING AND ZONING, C) INHERITANCE TAX, AND D) PUT THE PROFIT BACK INTO FARMING.	4.75
2	FOREIGN INVESTORS--LOCAL PEOPLE CAN'T COMPETE.	4.58
3	INFLATION.	4.27
4	NEED TO RECOGNIZE PROBLEMS AND REACT IMMEDIATELY.	4.00
5	INDIAN WATER RIGHTS -- NEED TO SPECIFY QUANTITY IN SPECIFIC AMOUNTS.	3.92
6	ENCOURAGE EFFICIENT USE OF WATER.	3.92
7	TOD MANY IRRIGATION WELLS--NEED TO ESTABLISH A CONTROL BOARD UNDER STATE CONTROL.	3.75
8	BRINGING MARGINAL LAND INTO PRODUCTION CAUSES SILT ACCUMULATION IN PONDS AND STREAMS.	3.75
9	SIZE OF FARMS--CONTROL OF CONGLOMERATES.	3.75
10	AGENCIES HAVE INCONSISTENT POLICY FOR FOLLOWING MANAGEMENT PLANS (BIA, GREAT PLAINS, FS, BLM, ASOS) --PEOPLE WHO LACK EXPERIENCE ARE MAKING DECISIONS.	3.73



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11	NEED FOR SCS-RSCS ASSISTANCE FOR A WIDER RANGE OF PRACTICES FOR A SMALL FARMER.	3.73
12	NOXIOUS WEEDS ON STATE AND FEDERAL LAND AND WATERS ARE A GENERAL PROBLEM.	3.67
13	ENERGY DEVELOPMENT VERSUS AGRICULTURAL LAND: --COAL STRIP MINING AND --TRANSMISSION LINES.	3.67
14	AGENCY REGULATIONS ARE NOT HELPING SMALL FARMERS.	3.67
15	FEDERAL EMPLOYEES TOO LARGE COMPARED TO NUMBER OF FARMERS.	3.58
16	WATER RIGHTS--AMOUNT OF TIME TO ACQUIRE.	3.51
17	PUBLIC LAND USE POLICIES AFFECTING RANCHING AND LUMBERING (GRAZING FEES, ETC.).	3.45
18	RECREATIONAL VEHICLES DESTRUCTION OF LAND.	3.45
19	SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICT NEED GREATER MANAGEMENT IN POLLUTION CONTROL, INSTEAD OF DEC OR EPA.	3.42
20	ABSORBING PRIVATE INTO FEDERAL LAND.	3.42



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WORKING GROUP V SOURCES OF ADDITIONAL INCOME/FARM FAMILY LIVING

PROBLEM RANK	PROBLEM DESCRIPTION	AVERAGE PROBLEM RANK
1	FARM FAMILY INCOME IS MUCH TOO LOW IN RESPECT TO EXPENSES.	4.69
2	FARM INCOME FROM PRODUCTION NOT KEEPING UP WITH INFLATION.	4.69
3	CHANGES ARE NEEDED IN INHERITANCE TAX LAWS.	4.62
4	NEED CHANGE IN RULES AND REGULATIONS TO ALLOW THE SMALL SCALE FARMER TO PARTICIPATE IN COLLECTING INCOME FROM THE PROCESSING AND MARKETING PROCESS.	4.46
5	FARMERS HOME ADMINISTRATION HOME LOANS TO FARMERS ARE TOO SMALL.	4.25
6	NEED THE EXTENSION OF THE COVERAGE OF GENERAL LIABILITY INSURANCE.	4.00
7	FARMERS NEED FUNDS FOR CONTINUING EDUCATION AFTER HIGH SCHOOL TO HELP THEM GET OUTSIDE EMPLOYMENT, THEREBY SUPPLEMENTING THEIR INCOMES.	3.83
8	HOW CAN THE SMALL FARMER HAVE A STRONGER VOICE IN LOCAL POLITICAL CONTROL.	3.69
9	NEED FOR MORE ON-THE-JOB TRAINING.	3.64
10	NONFARM BUSINESS MOVING INTO RURAL AREAS ARE DRIVING UP HOUSING COSTS.	3.62



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11	HEALTH CARE AND HEALTH INSURANCE COSTS ARE TOO HIGH.	3.54
12	NEED MORE INFORMATION ON USING METHANE, GASHAUL, SOLAR, WIND, AND OTHER SOURCES OF ALTERNATE ENERGY.	3.50
13	WE SHOULDN'T HAVE TO HAVE A SOURCE OF ADDITIONAL INCOME.	3.46
14	EDUCATIONAL COSTS ARE TOO HIGH.	3.46
15	NEED INFORMATION ON DUTIES AND FUNCTIONS OF CITY-COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSIONS.	3.38
16	HOW CAN COMMUNITY FACILITIES BECOME MORE AWARE OF THE FARM FAMILY?	3.33
17	HOW DO YOU INCREASE NONFARM INCOME WITHOUT DAMAGING THE SMALL FARM?	3.17
18	NEED TO FIND WAYS TO REDUCE HEATING COSTS.	3.17
19	FAMILY BUDGETING--HOW DOES IT WORK FOR FARM FAMILY.	3.17
20	NEED TO KNOW WHERE TO GO TO GET ASSISTANCE IN SETTING UP NONFARM ENTERPRISES.	3.17

One hundred and twenty-six preconference problems were considered during the conference.

Ninety-two of these were different problems (work groups I and II used the same set of 34 problems).

From the 126 problems, 68 were deleted or reworded as new problems.

One hundred and seventeen new or reworded problems were added.

The conference delegates rated 175 problems.

The top 20 problems per work group are presented in this conference report.

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